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ABSTRACT

Because resources from the federal government will continue to diminish, and because rising costs and inflation could make quality child care services more scarce and expensive than they are at present, it is crucial to examine new alternatives for meeting child care needs in the 1980's. Dramatic changes in the structure of the American family in recent years and in the work force during the past decade have stimulated the need for more care services. Statistics available in Virginia reflect the same trends exhibited at the national level; additionally, reports and conferences held in recent years document the growing need for child care in this commonwealth. Of special concern is the need for day care services for infants, school-age children, and handicapped children, as well as the necessity for providing quality programs. Current initiatives to develop a comprehensive strategy for day care within Virginia have resulted in largely piecemeal efforts dealing with a single aspect of the situation. Comprehensive interagency cooperation is needed if future challenges are to be met. Some new alternatives and strategies that can potentially affect Virginia's day care situation include establishing a day care council, involving business and industry in providing child care, marketing child care, and extending tax credits to parents. (RH)

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CHILD CARE IN THE 1980's
Exploring New Resources

AN ISSUE STATEMENT

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Problem Statement

I. Introduction

The increasing number of women working outside the home, and a rise in the number of single parent families and families where both parents work, will continue to yield a demand for more quality child day care services. However, it is apparent that resources from the Federal government will be shrinking, and that rising costs and inflation could make quality child care services more scarce and expensive. Therefore, it is crucial that we begin to examine new alternatives that can meet the child care needs of the 80's.

II. The Need for Child Care

A. Demographic and Social Changes

Profound demographic and social changes during the past decade have greatly increased the demand for quality child care services. Dramatic changes in the actual structure of the American family in recent years are of significance. In 1950, almost eighty percent (80%) of all households were headed by married couples. By the year 1990, it is estimated that this figure will fall to just over fifty percent (50%). Of the estimated 20 million new households expected between 1975 and 1990, only three to four million will be headed by married couples. The remaining households will be headed by the never married, divorced, or widowed population. An ever increasing divorce rate and a declining marriage rate are important variables associated with these structural changes.[1]

The employment of women is also a primary variable in creating the need for more day care services for children. In 1978, approximately 16.1 million women in the national labor force had children under the age of 18, and, of these, about 5.8 million had children under the age of 6. In 1970, the labor force participation for all women with preschool children was thirty percent (30%); by 1978, this figure had risen to forty-four percent (44%).[2] Thus, dramatic changes in the work force during the past decade, punctuated by the increasing number of mothers working outside the home, has also stimulated the need for more child care services.

B. The Need in Virginia

In Virginia available statistics reflect the same type of trends exhibited at the national level. In 1975, fifty-five percent (55%) of those mothers in the Commonwealth with children under 18 were working. Futhermore, forty-seven percent (47%) of all mothers with children under 6 were working.[3]

A 1977 survey of 2,296 Virginia families by the Division for Children found that fourteen percent (14%) of all families responding indicated a need for day care services. This figure rose to twenty-two percent (22%) for those unemployed mothers who were looking for work.[4]

Reports and conferences held in recent years also document the need for child care in the Commonwealth. In 1973, the Governor's Conference on Day Care Needs in Virginia acknowledged that "Virginia has seriously neglected many of its youngest and most vulnerable citizens and their families - those who are in need of regular child care outside the home."[5] In 1976, the

Needs of Young Children Report indicated that there is a severe shortage of quality day care programs and urged the State to look more closely at increasing the resources made available for day care.

C. Special Needs

Of special concern is the need for day care services for infants, school age children, and handicapped children. Most day care centers will not accept children under the age of two, therefore, the only choice an infant's parents may have is to place the child in a family day care home or more informal arrangements. While the care in a home may be excellent, most are not subject to licensure. Thus, there is less control over the quality of care than in a licensed center. This points to the need for consumer education which can inform parents about the types of alternative day care arrangements that may be available, and help them select quality care for their children.

Day care for the school age child is a special and perhaps unrecognized need facing many American families. In the United States there are at least 5 million school age children under the age of 13 enrolled in some form of before and after school day care arrangement.[6] However, before school, after school, and during holidays and school vacations, there are still at least 2 million young school age children between the ages of 7 and 13 that are left home alone with no supervision. This figure does not include the number of 5 and 6 year olds who could be in similar situations.[7] Because the parents of these children must work during these time periods, many school age children are sent home with a key tied around their necks. This phenomenon has engendered the term "latchkey child."

Day care programs must also be established that provide the setting for the special care of handicapped children. Programs must be planned that provide these children with intensive and early remediation and training. In addition, special training for caregivers must be provided in order for them to work effectively with handicapped children. Providing these children with a stimulating day care experience can help to prevent institutionalization and can lessen the impact of their handicaps later in their lives.

D. The Need for Quality

The early period of a child's life is critically important to the proper physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of the child. Thus a quality day care environment is not only one that assures the safety and protection of the child, but also aids in the proper growth and total development of the child. For example, all equipment and play materials should be suitable for the age level of the child. The activities in the program should encourage the child to increase his/her use of language, develop new concepts, make friends, grow socially and emotionally, and to be creative. In addition, the day care provider should know what things a child is physically, emotionally, and intellectually capable of doing at a particular age.

Unfortunately, many day care environments may not be of a quality nature. And in many areas, care may not be available at all. While it is important to meet the increasing demand for child care services, it is also important to insure the quality of new and existing programs.

E. Shrinking Resources

The demographic and social changes discussed in A above, as well as

double digit inflation, have often made participation in the work force and the need for child care a necessity rather than a choice. Finding available child care at an affordable price has become a serious problem for parents. This problem is multiplied many times over for a single parent who is faced with the dilemma of supporting and raising a family alone.

Compounding this situation is the fact that the Federal government has begun to limit its role in the provision of child care services. Reductions in programs such as Title XX, CETA, and child nutrition, point to the need to look to other alternatives for the financial support of child care.

III. Past Accomplishments and Current Status

Perhaps one of the most important events in recent years in Virginia on behalf of young children was the Governor's Conference on Day Care Needs in Virginia, held May 2nd - 3rd, 1973, in Richmond. A recurring theme during the Conference was the ever increasing need for child care services in the Commonwealth. Several recommendations from the Conference have been realized, such as the establishment of the Division for Children and a revision of the day care standards by the Department of Welfare.

However, the type of comprehensive interagency cooperation envisioned by the Conference has never become a reality. Part of this is due to lack of accompanying funding and even more of it is due to the difficulty of getting caregivers, legislators, state officials, and citizens to work together to develop a child care agenda. Rather than designing a

comprehensive strategy for the development of child care within the Commonwealth the initiatives that have occurred have been largely piecemeal and scattershot efforts dealing but with one aspect of the situation.

IV. New Alternatives for Addressing Virginia's Child Care Needs

Addressing the day care needs of the Commonwealth's children and families in the 1980's is not something that can be accomplished by one agency or organization in isolation. We must all work together if we are to meet the future challenges of child care.

The following are some new alternatives/strategies that can possibly impact on the need for day care in the State.

A. Establishment of a Day Care Council

As recommended at the Division for Children's 1980 Legislative Forum, we are proposing to establish a Day Care Advisory Council. While the Council is in the final planning stages, it is anticipated that it would be composed of approximately fifteen members, and that the groups represented would include state agencies, parents, providers and provider organizations, child development specialists, and the business community. We feel that it is paramount that both the public and private sectors be represented on the Council. The Day Care Council would serve in an advisory capacity to the Division for Children on child care matters of statewide significance. The special problems of infant care, care for school age children, and day care for handicapped children, are particular concerns that could be considered by the Council.

B. Involvement of Business and Industry in Providing Child Care

The increasing need for day care, particularly among working parents, signals a need for employers to become involved in the provision of child care services. When problems such as absenteeism, turnover, and dissatisfaction are related to the need for child care, an employer can potentially alleviate such problems by facilitating the provision of services. Furthermore, certain tax benefits can accrue to the employer who provides day care services for his/her employees.

An employer can provide, or assist in the provision of services, in the following ways.

1. On-site day care services
2. A voucher system for employees to purchase their own child care.
3. Purchase of day care slots in local centers or homes for employees.
4. Contributions of equipment, materials or money to local centers or homes.
5. Provision of legal, accounting, public relations, and advertising services to local programs.
6. Establishment of information and referral services for employees.
7. Other services such as a parent education, care for sick children, and care for school age children before and after school.

Success stories such as the Stride Rite Children's Center in Boston, and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union center in Winchester, Virginia, have shown that participation by industry in child care can reap

benefits for employers, employees, and the community as a whole.

C. Marketing Child Care

In this time of reduced resources and rising costs, the marketing of child care services is becoming critically important. Parents in need of child care services, in many cases, may not know where or how to find quality care for their children. Conversely, many providers, especially family day care providers, may not be aware of how to make their services known to parents.

Family day care systems, child care associations, civic organizations, and other public and private groups, have provided, and can continue to provide, assistance in the marketing of quality child care services. Services provided by such groups can include serving as a sponsor for the Child Care Food Program, consumer education, information and referral for parents, recruitment and screening of providers, training and technical assistance for providers, and public relations and advertising for providers. Examples of excellent organizations of this type in the State are the Central Virginia Child Development Association in Charlottesville; The Tidewater Child Care Association in Portsmouth; the League of Women Voters; and the Fairfax Office for Children in Fairfax County, to name a few. The latter organization is actually part of the Fairfax County government. These and other organizations should be commended for their endeavors in marketing quality child care in the Commonwealth. Furthermore, the formation of more groups should be encouraged. In this way, a network of organizations might be formed to promote the provision of quality and affordable child care in Virginia.

One quality child care program that has been successful in maintaining funding battles with the Federal government is Head Start. The grassroots support of Head Start in local communities, as well as positive evaluations and good public relations, have been effective tools in securing and maintaining resources. While resources from the Federal level may continue to be limited, local programs and communities can utilize these same tools to solicit funds and involvement from other sources - such as business and industry.

Training and technical assistance for providers and consumer education for parents are of particular importance. A variety of training and technical assistance needs are associated with establishing a child care center or becoming a family day care provider. For example, local building codes and zoning regulations may vary greatly from locality to locality. A family day care provider may have a need for toys and recreational equipment, while an individual or group of individuals may need capital to start a center based program.

Since most children in day care, particularly infants, are cared for by family day care providers, the need for training and technical assistance for this group becomes very important. Family day care providers are in a sense isolated and do not have the support of a centralized center based program, thus their training and technical assistance needs may be multiplied many times over.

A coordinated and comprehensive approach to providing training and technical assistance to center staff and family day care providers is perhaps the best approach to assuring the availability of competent and caring child care providers. State agencies, private industry, and local community agencies/

groups must work together, as discussed above, to form a network of concerned professionals who can identify and meet the training needs of child care providers, and share and disseminate information about training opportunities. As a part of this training, credentialing, such as with the Child Development Associate certificate, should be further encouraged in order to provide professional recognition for providers who have completed training. Also, the establishment of the Division for Children Day Care Council, discussed in A above, can be an important first step in bringing groups together and in promoting coordinated training efforts designed to improve the quality of child care.

Consumer education is also very important, since it can assist parents in obtaining quality care for their children. To assist in this endeavor, the Division for Children has published Quality Day Care for You and Your Child, a booklet designed to assist parents in selecting the appropriate type of quality day care arrangement for their children. Also, as discussed above, associations and other groups in the Commonwealth have also provided valuable assistance in consumer education.

D. Tax Credits for Parents

One means by which Congress has assisted families with children is that of providing a tax credit for child care. Until recent Congressional action, families were eligible for a tax credit of twenty percent (20%) of their child care expenses up to a maximum of $2,000 in expenses for one child and $4,000 for two or more children. In August of this year, Congress passed new legislation which in essence establishes a sliding scale for

the tax credit. Families earning $10,000 or less will be eligible for a credit of thirty percent (30%) of their expenses. Then, for each $2,000 in income above $10,000, the credit will be reduced by one percent (1%) until it reaches $28,000 where a family will be eligible for a twenty percent (20%) credit. The maximum expenses were also increased to $2,400 for one child and $4800 for two or more children. Although a refundable tax credit provision for poor families was eliminated in the final bill, the Congress should be commended for this effort to assist families in their child care needs.

V. Conclusions

This problem statement has emphasized the increasing need for child day care services in a time of rising costs and reduced resources. However, it has also suggested and supported some new alternatives which can assist in meeting the need for child care. In essence, these alternatives emphasize the involvement of both the public and private sectors and the entire community.

Indeed, the involvement of public and private organizations, parents, providers, and the entire community can form a very important tool - advocacy. By uniting our collective financial resources, expertise, energies, and commitments, we can speak with one common voice and thus advocate effectively for quality child care in the Commonwealth.

Footnotes

[1] George Masnick and Mary Jo Bane, The Nation's Families: 1960-1990 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Joint Center for Urban Studies of MIT and Harvard University, (n.d.), p.1.

[2] U.S. Department of Labor, Women in the Labor Force: Some New Data Series, Report 575 (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1979), p.2.

[3] U.S. Department of Labor, "Current Employment Status of Women 16 Years Old and Over by Marital Status and Presence and Age of Own Children, Spring, 1976," unpublished material from the Survey of Income and Education, 1976. February, 1978.

[4] Commonwealth of Virginia. Division for Children, Children, Youth and Families in Virginia: Assessing Their Needs (Richmond, Virginia, 1978), p.249.

[5] Report of Governor's Conference on Day Care Needs in Virginia, Richmond, 1973, p.5.

[6] U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, The Appropriateness of the Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1978), p. xix.

[7] James A. Levine and Michelle Settzer," "Why Are these Children Staying After School? And Why Are They So Happy About It?" Redbook, September, 1980, p.158.